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April 29, 2005

Full funding of federal payments pushed

[Cliff Thompson](#)

April 26, 2005

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EAGLE COUNTY - Federal lawmakers from Western states want to increase what the government pays counties and are proposing legislation to do so.

So-called "Payments in Lieu of Taxes" last year in Eagle County amounted to \$841,000, or less than \$1 per acre for the 600,000 acres owned by the U.S. Forest Service and 235,000 owned by the Bureau of Land Management. That's 75 percent of the county's 848,592 acres.

The payments to counties were initiated in 1876 after it became evident that counties containing federally-owned land could not collect enough taxes to support services such as road maintenance. Over the years, Congress did not fund fully what had been authorized for the counties.

Eagle County over the last 10 years has lost out on \$400,000 or more, said Lawrence Pacheco, spokesman for Eagle County Congressman Mark Udall, one of the sponsors of a bill, HR 788, that seeks to fund the payments fully.

Statistics provided by Udall's office show Colorado's 2nd Congressional District - comprised of Boulder, Clear Creek, Eagle, Gilpin, Grand, Jefferson, Summit and Weld counties - received \$13 million in payments from 1995 to 2004. The amount authorized was \$22.85 million.

The bipartisan move to increase the payments is being pushed by the Congressional Western Caucus. It also has the support of Rep. John Salazar, Rep. Joel Hefley and Udall.

The proposed legislation would also require full funding of similar payments from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

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